Introduction to Hinduism

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MY KARMA ran over your dogma.
What is “Hinduism”?

1. HINDU
   - corruption of SINDHU, the ancient Sanskrit name for the INDUS river

2. Western scholarly construction
   - Included among “Eastern Religions”
Hindu Population Distribution by Country

- **601,000-910,000,000**
- **230,000-600,999**
- **120,000-229,999**
History

6,000–1900 BCE: Indus-Sarasvati Civilization
History, continued

1500–500 BCE: Vedic Period (also referred to as the “Aryan migration”)
500 BCE–500 CE: Epic, Puranic and Classical Ages
500 CE–1200 CE: Early and Middle Medieval Period
  ➢ Early development of bhakti (esp. in South India)
  ➢ Formation of sampradayas
  ➢ Theological establishment of Vedanta
1200–1757 CE: Muslim Period
  ➢ Bhakti saints and the cultivation of personal piety
  ➢ Development of the theistic traditions
1757–1947 CE: British Period
  ➢ The reform movements and birth of neo-Hinduism
1947 CE–present: Independent India
  ➢ Emigration to Britain, Europe, and North America
Beliefs: God (OM)

1. Monism: Advaita [“Mainstream”]
   - Underlying power in the universe, Brahman
   - Brahman is perfect, omniscient, omnipresent, incorporeal, independent, creator of the world, causeless, eternal, immutable, immanent, and transcendent

1b. Attributive Monism: Vishishtadvaita
   - Brahman is composed of the universe, sentient beings, and Ishvara

2. Monotheism: Dvaita
   - Supreme transcendent being known as “Vishnu”
   - Distinct from human souls
Beliefs: Principles

- **Atman**
  - life-giving force, “soul”; In plants, animals, and human beings (vegetarianism)

- **Moksha [or mukti]**
  - escape from cycle of reincarnation, *samsara*

- **Dharma (path to right living)**
  - Sanatana Dharma (the eternal truth)
  - Varnashrama Dharma (how to fulfill one’s station in life)

- **Karma**
  - acts from previous life that determine station in next life; results of thought, word and action; “what goes around, comes around”

- **Maya**
  - Ignorance

- **Samadhi**
  - super-consciousness of God, enlightenment
Teachings: Four Aims (of Life)

1. Dharma
   – religious and moral life
2. Artha
   – economic development
3. Kama
   – appropriate gratification of the senses
4. Moksha
   – escape from cycle of reincarnation, *samsara*
Teachings: Four Pathways

1. Karma yoga
   – action and selfless deeds
2. Jnana yoga
   – spiritual knowledge
3. Raj(a) yoga
   – self-control through meditation
4. Bhakti yoga
   – devotion
Four Stages of Life (Ashramas)

1. Brahmacharya  
   – student

2. Grihastha  
   – householder

3. Vaananaprastha  
   – retreat, meditation

4. Sanyaasa  
   – renunciation, seeking Moksha
Four Varnas (stations)

1. Brahmins
   • scholars & priests

2. Kshatriyas
   • kings, nobles, & warriors

3. Vaishyayas
   • farmers & merchants

4. Shudras
   • artisans & servants
Jatis (communities; “scheduled castes”—British term)

1. Brahmins (scholars & priests)
   - Rarhi Brahmins (Northeast Indian priests)
   - Kashmiri Pandits (Kashmir scholars)

2. Kshatriyas (kings, nobles, & warriors)
   - Khatri (Punjabi warriors)
   - Nadars (South Indian rulers)

3. Vaishyas (farmers & merchants)
   - Patels (Northwest Indian farmers)
   - Vaniyas (Northwest Indian traders)

4. Shudras (artisans & servants)
   - Lohars (North Indian iron-workers)
   - Kumhars (potters)
Scriptures & Literature

1. Dharma sutras = “shruti” (divinely revealed)
   - **Vedas** (truths of existence)—most sacred
     A. Samhitas (hymns)
     B. Brahmanas (rituals)
     C. Aranyakas (rituals)
     D. Upanishads (wisdom, spirituality)

2. Dharma shastras = “smriti” (laws, ways of living)
   - Manusmriti (code for living, rights & responsibilities)
   - Itihasas (records, legendary past)
     - Ramayana (epic)
     - Mahabharata (epic poem)

- Darshanas (philosophy)
- Puranas (mythological literature)
- Agamas, Sutras, Vedanga, Dharma Shastras, & Prasthana-vakyas
Philosophical Systems (darshhanas)

1. Mimamsa (action)
2. Nyaya (logic)
3. Vaisheshika (composition and structure of matter)
4. Sankhya (function of matter)
5. Yoga (mind-body discipline)
6. Vedanta (ultimate reality and spiritual knowledge)
Deities

- Represent divine attributes
  - Many consider attributes to be incarnated or “born” into exemplary human beings (avataars)
- ‘Enlivened’ through priestly rite
  - Many regard as containing a divine spark
- Ishta-devata
  - Individuals choose which deity to worship
Deity “Genealogy”

BRAHMA(N): ABSOLUTE UNSEEN POWER

PARVATI: LOVE & DEVOTION

SHIVA: CREATIVE & DESTRUCTIVE FORCE

GANESHA: REMOVES OBSTACLES

KARTIKEYA/SUBRAMANIAM: COMMANDER, ARMY OF GODS

VISHNU: PROTECTION & CONCERN

KRISHNA: WARRIOR/YOUTH

RAMA: IDEAL MAN

Divine “Trinity”

10 INCARNATIONS
Sri (Lord) Ganesha

- son of Parvati and Shiva
- remover of all obstacles
- worshipped first before starting any religious function
- two consorts, siddhi (achievement) & buddhi (intellect), or siddhi & ruddhi (prosperity)
Ritual: Prayer-Chant

Gayatri Mantra
Dear God, You are the Giver and Sustainer of all life, the Remover of all sorrows, the Bestower of bliss. [The Creator of the Universe, the One who always inspires us, You alone are worthy of worship, You are the Light which illuminates us, the Fire which burns away all our evil desires. You are the Supreme Being. We meditate on You. You who have all these qualities, please inspire our intellect so that we may move forward, may we be able to tell right from wrong and always follow the right path.]

Ritual, continued

• **Puja (worship)**
  – Washing before (purity/pollution)
  – Hymns, Blessings, Prayers
  – Prasada (consecrated food)

• **Arati or Aarti, “highest love for God”**

• Pilgrimage

*Tirupati*
Ritual, continued

• Pilgrimage, continued

Varanasi

Mathura
Ritual, continued

• Pilgrimage, continued

Mt. Kailash

Ganges
Ritual, continued

Samskaras *(sacraments*)

- Pregnancy
- Naming
- Solid food
- Hair-cutting
- Alphabet-teaching
- Formal education
- Marriage
- 60th Birthday
- Funeral

*The number and selection of these varies from 8-40.*
Sacred Space: Temple
Sri Meenakshi Devasthanam Temple
Pearland, TX
Sacred Space: Temple
Sri Meenakshi Devasthanam Temple
Pearland, TX
Temple Layout

1. Durga
2. Ganesha
3. Ayyappa
4. Nandi
5. Siva
6. Meenakshi
7. Karudalvar
8. Padhmavathi
9. Venkateshwara
10. Navagrahas
11. Nataraja
12. Murugan
13. Rama
14. Jyothi
15. Kannika Parameswari
16. Bairaver
17. Radhakrishna
18. Hanuman
19. Gajalakshmi
Festivals (vary considerably)

- New Year *(Nov. 3, 2010)*
- Ramanavami
- Hanuman Jayanti
- Guru Purnima
- Raksha Bandhan
- Sri Krishna Jayanti
- Krishna Janmashtami
- Ganesha Chaturthi
- Navaratri
- Dasera
- Diwali
- Vasant Panchami
- Maha Shivaratri
- Holi

Most commonly observed
Authority Figures

Traditionally Male*

- Household Priest (*purohit*)
  - Family rituals outside the temple
- Temple Priest (*pujari*)
  - Veneration and care of temple deities

Male and Female

- Rishis
  - advanced sages who have accomplished *samadhi*
- Mahatma/Deva (saint)
- Sannyasi (ascetic)
  - Often called “swami”
- Guru
  - master teacher/guide
- Yogi
  - spiritual master or adherent of *yoga*

*In recent years, women have trained as priests, yet they face opposition in certain areas.
Symbols and Iconography

- Carvings representing Hindu lore
- OM, or AUM
- Deities & their accoutrements
- Food offerings (raisins, milk, rice, bananas, turmeric, rose water, ghee, coconut, e.g.)
- Fire
- Holy Water
- Incense
- Conch
- Cow
- Swastika
- Six-pointed star
- Tilak
- Bindi
Sources

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  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGFpd3mcVv0>.

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Recommended Reading


A neo-Hindu perspective:

Recommended Reading

FOR THE BJP issue, see: